



GEAR UP

CHANGING LIVES IN WASHINGTON STATE

"We may be America's future, but GEAR UP is ours."

— Sara Wilder, GEAR UP Student

When it began in 1999, GEAR UP was hailed as the "missing piece" in the federal government's effort to make college accessible to low-income students.

While other well-established federally-funded programs like Upward Bound and Talent Search focused on students in high school, GEAR UP was the first to concentrate on low-income middle school students.

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, GEAR UP stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs.

Research shows that high school is too late to reach many students who get discouraged and leave school before graduating. Thus, many educators welcomed the GEAR UP initiative when it began in 1999, and was continued in 2000 by President George W. Bush.

GEAR UP Goals, Objectives

GEAR UP's national goal is "to significantly increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in post-secondary education."

GEAR UP's objectives are:

- Increasing the academic performance and preparation for post-secondary education for GEAR UP students.
- Increasing the rate of high school graduation and participation in post-secondary education for GEAR UP students.
- Increasing GEAR UP students' and parents' knowledge of post-secondary education, preparation and financing.

To meet the goal and objectives, a state GEAR UP Program and ten



GEAR UP Partnerships provide services to students in more than 20 locations in Washington.

Washington State GEAR UP

The U.S. Department of Education awarded Washington State a five-year GEAR UP grant in 1999, and added an additional grant year in 2004-05. The Higher Education Coordinating Board, in cooperation with the Office of the Governor, monitors the state GEAR UP grant, which provides comprehensive counseling, financial aid, and tutoring services through ten GEAR UP Scholars projects.

The Scholars projects have served more than 1,200 students annually during each of the past five years. Results include:

- 550 students have earned college scholarships totaling \$3.1 million; another 268 students are eligible to earn scholarships in 2004-05.
- 82 percent of GEAR UP Scholars took algebra or higher-level mathematics by the end of the 9th grade.
- 75 percent of Washington's GEAR UP graduates enrolled in college within two years of high

school graduation.

- 98 percent of active GEAR UP seniors in 2004-05 graduated from high school.

The state GEAR UP grant includes a partnership with the University of Washington, which provided week-long summer institutes for more than 750 students each year. Students experienced campus life, as well as academic, cultural, and recreational activities, with university students often serving as

counselors and mentors. The university also offered year-round professional development training for 50 teachers, with a focus on the needs of GEAR UP students.

Other state GEAR UP partners are the Washington Education Foundation and Pasco School District.

GEAR UP Partnerships

The U.S. Department of Education also funded GEAR UP Partnerships, local consortia of K-12, higher education, and community organizations.

The ten GEAR UP Partnerships, located in urban and rural areas of the state, have raised expectations and hope for more than 20,000 students annually. As a result, students who once thought that college was unattainable are now graduating from high school with higher education expectations, and dreams of bright futures.

This brochure contains the words of students who have been served in Washington's GEAR UP programs, and provides a glimpse of a few of the programs that have been at work in Washington State since 1999.

With this program, I can be a criminal profiler, or a publisher, or even a doctor.

My name is Sara.

My last name is Wilder, but I once had a teacher who called me Sara Tamer. I like him.

I've always been the shy, quiet type, until I got to know you really well, then I could laugh loud and tell truly awful jokes with the best of 'em.

But there was another secret (and really depressing) side to me. I believed I had no future. I come from a low-income family. My mother and father were both very young when I was born, and they split up soon after. My mother went on to have three more daughters, and a son. That's five in all. A lot of financial responsibility for a woman who works as a checker in a grocery store.

When you have to come up with enough money just to pay bills every month, it's a real impossibility to set aside a college fund for even one child, let alone five.

I accepted it. I felt I knew my limitations. I believed I could never go to college, never have an actual career that I loved.

When it came to my grades, it was always "all or nothing." If I couldn't have straight A's for some reason, then it would be straight F's. I didn't think it even mattered. That's one of the saddest things, I think. I loved to learn, but I didn't even try. After all, it wasn't as if someone like me, with my background, would ever have a chance to go to college anyway.

I didn't let myself dwell on this too often. As I said, it was depressing. But the off-guard moments... they could be devastating. My grandmother would talk about her dreams for me. She'd once visited WSU when she was a young nurse, and she said she always envied the students who walked around campus in their



college jackets. She always wanted... still wants... that for me. I'm sure you understand how crushing it is when you feel as if you're destined to disappoint that one person who would do anything for you, who wants you to have everything they never were able to have for themselves.

And then there were my dreams... to be a criminal profiler, a crime scene investigator, a publisher, a writer, maybe even a doctor? Forget about it... forget about my dreams.

I felt lost. Without hope I would never realize any of my career dreams and goals, never wear a college jacket and make my grandmamma proud. Never have a future.

Obviously, at this point, I'd never heard of GEAR UP. GEAR UP stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate

programs. To me, it stands for salvation.

In GEAR UP, we help out our community by performing various community service activities. I get important up-to-date information about colleges and different career fields.

We go on field trips to different colleges we probably never would have thought of if we hadn't seen first-hand how truly spectacular they are. We cover different tutoring strategies that really help me when I'm doing my own schoolwork, or when I'm helping my sisters and cousins with theirs.

With this program, I can be a criminal profiler, or a publisher, or even a doctor. With this program, I'll be able to get a jacket for my grandma.

With this program, hundreds of young men and women from low-income families, just like me, can go to college, and eventually go into the different and unique (or maybe not so unique) career paths they have chosen, paths they've only been able to dream about, had it not been for GEAR UP.

We may be America's future, but GEAR UP is ours.

Sara Wilder

Sara Wilder
GEAR UP Student

GEAR UP is amazing.

GEAR UP is amazing. Without this program I highly doubt that I would be going to college. Before GEAR UP, I didn't really have any support and they have helped motivate and encourage me.

GEAR UP staff has also helped me to set goals and identify the steps I need to take to achieve those goals. They helped me to complete my FAFSA, and to fill out and turn in college applications.

If I wasn't in this program I

would've probably just thought it was too hard or that I couldn't get the money to go unless I wanted to be in debt right after. I used to feel very afraid of going to college and so unprepared. But since GEAR UP I feel excited, ready, and have some scholarship money. I would be lying if I said I wasn't just a little nervous, but it's nothing compared to how I used to feel.

I have been in this program for three years



GEAR UP — Changing Lives in Washington State

GEAR UP helped me to plan ahead.

GEAR UP helped me to plan ahead for my educational future, when I wasn't even thinking about college. I first came to Aberdeen when I was sixteen years old. I moved here from San Jose, California, with my boyfriend, Luciano, (who is now my husband) and our three-month-old son, Carlos.

After moving seven times since I had started high school, all I wanted to do was just get into a school, and stay there long enough to graduate. At this time, I wasn't even thinking about going to college. All I was thinking about was taking care of my family and getting my high school diploma.

During my first year at Harbor High, Luciano and I had another son, José. This is around the first time I heard of GEAR UP. So, in June of 2001, I joined GEAR UP. I enjoyed it very much, and by July I had become a GEAR UP Ambassador.



and I've seen it help other students go to college and a lot of these students were teen parents. I see GEAR UP as a win-win program because in this program we earn scholarship money doing community service. So not only does it help us, it helps the people in our community.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Naomi Calderon".

Naomi Calderon
GEAR UP Student



When the next school year began, I entered the 11th grade. This is when I started to realize how helpful GEAR UP was. During school hours, I could go into the GEAR UP office if I needed somewhere quiet to do my homework. If I was looking for some extra help on my homework, I knew I could find that help in the GEAR UP office. The staff were always helpful. Even when it did not concern school.

Some of the things I was able to do during my 11th grade year were my leadership project, which was tutoring at Alexander Young Elementary School. There, I tutored 2nd grade children in math, and helped 3rd grade children with reading. I helped out at Emerson School family nights in Hoquiam, and I went on a field trip to Grays Harbor Community College. During the summer, I worked as a counselor at WSU day camp in Elma, and I volunteered in an ESL (English as a Second Language) preschool class during their four-week program. I also worked as a volunteer office aide in the Harbor High and Hopkins Preschool offices.

I loved my senior year, and I couldn't imagine it without being in GEAR UP. I continued to do many community service activities, including a few new ones, such as working as a volunteer at the Hoquiam Parks & Recreation Little League sign-ups, and running a booth at a family fun day at Lincoln School in Hoquiam. That year, the field trip I attended was to Bates Technical College in Tacoma. I also had the wonderful opportunity to go see the Nutcracker Ballet at the Paramount Theatre in Seattle.

During the summer, I volunteered at Snug Harbor Childcare Center, and I helped out at the River Festival

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in Hoquiam. This year I was able to attend Leadership Camp, which added the perfect ending to my senior year.

I graduated from Harbor High on June 11, 2003, with more than \$10,000 in scholarships earned from GEAR UP. The following fall I started attending Grays Harbor College and now I am in my second year.

I have also been working as a work-study student for GEAR UP since April of 2004. Working at the site gives me experience in working with middle school and high school children. This experience is very valuable to me, since I want to be a teacher.

GEAR UP helped me to plan ahead for my educational future, when I wasn't even thinking about college. GEAR UP has helped me in many other ways also. I'm not quite sure if I would still be in college today without GEAR UP. In fact, I'm not quite sure that I would have even gone to college without GEAR UP.

This GEAR UP program and its staff were a great support system for me, and they still are. I am very thankful that I had the opportunity to be a part of GEAR UP, and I hope many other students will be able to do so also.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kristin A. Juarez".

Kristin Juarez
GEAR UP Student

GEAR UP gave me opportunities to explore different universities and colleges.

This is my fifth year in GEAR UP. I am one of many scholars in the GEAR UP Scholarship Program.

You're probably thinking why am I still in GEAR UP. The reasons are I am from a low-income family, my parents immigrated from Cambodia and we settled here. If it wasn't for GEAR UP, I would not be thinking about going to college. My family

would not have the money to send me to college.

Yes, there are many scholarships I can apply for because of my family's income, like financial aid and many others. But if it wasn't for GEAR UP and the staff, I would not have known that.

GEAR UP has helped me focus on my assignments and the understanding of problems on a math assignment, English, and AP Chemistry. I get one-on-one



tutoring from State Work Study students, which fits into my learning habits. GEAR UP also gave me the opportunities to explore different universities and colleges, so I'll have the chance to see what it is like before I actually attend the university or college.

GEAR UP and the staff have done so much for me and I want it to continue so other students, especially ones from low-income families, get the opportunities that I've got from GEAR UP.

Anna Yim
GEAR UP Student

Michael is excelling academically in rigorous coursework.

*By Dorie Munson, Site Director
Spokane GEAR UP*

The first two years of high school, Michael G. (not his real name) was disruptive in classes, fought with many of his teachers, and was suspended multiple times.

Michael came from the West Central neighborhood in Spokane and was well-respected on the streets for years.

Late in his sophomore year, one of Michael's teachers, Julie, also a GEAR UP staff member, challenged him to come to school without getting high first, to stop fighting and gang-banging, and to use his talents and intellect to get ahead academically. Julie talked to him about GEAR UP and about going to college. Michael was quite resistant at first and was certain that, no matter what, he would never be able to go to college. His mom worked many hours each week in food services for a local hotel, was the sole support of the family, and they didn't have any money for college, according to Michael.

He also was sure that his grades would prevent him from going to

college even if his family did have money. Julie kept talking with Michael and also got to know his mom. Michael was nervous and worried that his mom, who spoke just a little English, wouldn't understand or support his desire to go away to college.

Now, fast-forward to the spring of Michael's senior year in high school.

Michael is excelling academically in rigorous coursework (pre-calculus, AP chemistry, etc.) and his chemistry teacher is awed by the speed and intensity of his learning and drive. She told us that she struggles to keep up with Michael and has never had a student so passionate about chemistry in all the years she's been teaching. His mom is now a very involved, informed, and supportive GEAR UP sponsor.

Michael has been accepted to Eastern Washington University and will begin his studies there this fall. Michael is the only one of us who is surprised that he was accepted to a four-year school, and a university at that! But we all knew that he could do it. He just needed to be



encouraged, informed of his options, and challenged to use his gifts in powerfully positive ways. And he needed to make the choice to be college-bound and allow us to support him in his choice.

Michael is contemplating studying either pre-med or aeronautical engineering. He is a tremendous GEAR UP Ambassador and is currently involved in a reading challenge with Julie. Just in the last two months, Michael read his first novel ever, just for pleasure, and is now finishing his fourth novel. At last report, Michael was ahead in the reading challenge and while we respect Julie's reading ability, our money's on Michael to win.

Where there were once no expectations, students and parents alike have come to insist on nothing short of college graduation.

By Chris Treviño, Coordinator
Quincy GEAR UP

It is 4:30 a.m. and my family is preparing for yet another grueling day in the fields and orchards of Central Washington.

We arrive at the worksite a little before sunrise where we receive our instructions for the day. Soon the sun is ablaze and the task of pulling weeds and extracting rocks from the soil is becoming more and more difficult as my body wears down.

Hunched over for the majority of the day, sweat begins to wear paths down my chin and nose, and my arms become heavier with each passing minute. Well-versed in adversity, though, my family finishes the laborious day and is forced to face another, as this is our obligatory trade and lifeline in the United States of America.

Later that evening while lying in bed, I began analyzing my life and that of my family, and I was struck by a disturbing realization. Our lives are solely dependent upon the soil we cultivate and the crops that grow from it. I wouldn't wish this life upon anyone, and frankly, my family and I are tired of it.

We understand that living the life advertised by this country will not become a reality without a college education. So I guess the GEAR UP Program's credo rings true for us — College. It's not a dream. It's a plan.



This sentiment and experience is shared by many Quincy GEAR UP Scholars. More than at any time in recent history, our Scholars' destinies have been of their choosing. Our students are no longer required to be farm workers and laborers. They can choose to be doctors, lawyers, pediatricians, businesspeople, or anything they desire.

Before GEAR UP came to Quincy, students aspired to be cashiers at local grocery stores and now realize they have the potential to be much more. The most striking difference we've observed in our students would have to be their heightened sense of self-confidence. Where there were once no expectations, students and parents alike have come to insist on nothing short of college graduation.

The GEAR UP Program has been instrumental in diverting middle-school students' attention from hair, makeup, and video games to the college experience and the inevitable success that will ensue. Through GEAR UP, students are being trained to consider post-secondary education at an early age so that they will be

better prepared when their senior year approaches.

The culture among students at our junior high and high school has changed dramatically. The chatter among students about college is increasing daily, with much of it being produced by "underprivileged, minority students."

What many students are coming to realize, directly because of GEAR UP, is that "underprivileged" is a mindset, not a destiny. Students are also aware that in many parts of Washington State, including Quincy, it is a misnomer to say that Latinos are "minorities."

Non-traditional scholarship earners and those labeled as "outcasts" have found a home in GEAR UP. Sometimes GEAR UP is their only real connection with the Quincy schools. Stripping these students of this program may leave them wandering aimlessly in an educational atmosphere yet to accept them.

Our goals in this community have yet to be met, but with one collective voice we shout, our best days lie ahead!

College. It's not a dream. It's a plan.

GEAR UP — Changing Lives in Washington State

There are ten GEAR UP Partnerships in Washington, funded separately from the state GEAR UP grant. Following is a brief description of efforts underway in the Wenatchee School District GEAR UP Partnership.

*By Carolyn Griffin-Bugert, Director
Wenatchee School District
GEAR UP*

There are three middle schools in the Wenatchee School District. The district's only GEAR UP program operates at Orchard Middle School.

The program serves 490 middle-school students. Sixty-five percent of the students are from low-income families and 40 percent are Hispanic.

Closing the Achievement Gap

GEAR UP staff recently helped organize a two-day medical camp where middle-school students could learn about medical careers and training opportunities. The GEAR UP staff at Orchard coordinated the event, recruiting many low-income and Hispanic participants.

Many needy students benefited from an enriching educational experience that would not have been available without a GEAR UP school in the community.

During the past year, all three Wenatchee middle schools had the opportunity to bring girls to a one-day science and math camp at Central Washington University.

The GEAR UP school recruited almost twice as many girls to participate as either of the other schools. Sixty-five percent of the attendees recruited by GEAR UP students from Orchard were from low-income families, and 47 percent of the attendees were Hispanic.



Of the three middle schools in Wenatchee, the GEAR UP school is the only one with a five-day-a-week, after-school Homework Center.

The Center serves 60 percent of the student body and average daily attendance at the GEAR UP Center is more than 45 students, with high percentages of low-income and Hispanic students making use of this important resource.

Five years of data demonstrate that students who use the Homework Center have shown great improvement in standardized test scores.

Creating Systemic Change

As a result of the GEAR UP program, there have been some significant systemic changes. Specifically:

- New relationships were formed with the local community college, with regular field trips, workshops, and activities geared toward middle-school students.
- Networking with the local four-year university has resulted in

**“There is a newly
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or privileged.”**

student teachers working more closely with teachers at the GEAR UP school.

- A local social service organization has adjusted its funding and staffing in order to commit significant staff time to GEAR UP students.
- Professional development through GEAR UP has infused teachers with a renewed enthusiasm for teaching.
- The GEAR UP school met Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals in all six categories in which it had previously not passed.

Taken as a whole, these are important accomplishments for the district as it attempts to meet the benchmarks established in federal No Child Left Behind policies and the state's WASL standards.

In sum, the Wenatchee School District's GEAR UP program at Orchard Middle School has become increasingly valuable. Students are now more aware of higher education opportunities and what it will take to get to college.

There is also a newly found sense among GEAR UP students that “college is for me, not just the wealthy or privileged.”

And, as we all know, getting students to believe in themselves, that “I can do it,” and that there is help along the way, moves them so much closer to becoming part of “The American Dream.”



GEAR UP — Changing Lives in Washington State

Washington State GEAR UP Program

Higher Education Coordinating Board
Ricardo Sanchez, State Director
(360) 753-7884 • ricardos@hecb.wa.gov



Grays Harbor Scholars Project
Doris Torkelson
Site Director
(360) 538-2177
torkels@wsu.edu

Wapato Scholars Project
Alana Delgado
Site Director
(509) 877-0922
alanadelgado@nlagroup.com

Inchelium Scholars Project
Christina Seymour
Site Coordinator
(509) 722-6181 ext. 233
cseymour@gearup-new.org

Quincy Scholars Project
Kirsten Escure
Site Director
(509) 797-8820
kirstenesecure@nlagroup.com

UW GEAR UP Project
Thomas Calhoun
Executive Director
(206) 685-9149
tcalhoun@u.washington.edu

Spokane Scholars Project
Dorie Munson
Site Director
(509) 990-2747
dmunson@gearup-new.org

Seattle Scholars Project
Cynthia Brooks-Hassen
Site Coordinator
(206) 252-0011
cgbrookshassen@seattleschools.org

Washington Education Foundation
Sue Byers
Director of School Programs
(425) 416-2020
sbyers@waedfoundation.org

Tacoma Scholars Project
Sheila Sawyer
Site Director
(253) 591-5321, Ext. 15
sheilas@tacomaparks.com

Yakima Scholars Project
Starla Gable
Site Director
(509) 573-2691
Gable.Starla@ysd.wednet.edu

Pasco School District
Teacher Mentoring/Training Program
Jim Rigney, Regional Coordinator
(509) 966-0139
amikay@yahoo.com

GEAR UP Partnerships in Washington State



Seattle GEAR UP
Lette Hadgu, Director
(206) 543-6436
thadgu@u.washington.edu

Wenatchee GEAR UP
Carolyn Griffin-Bugert, Director
(509) 667-8392
GB.C@mail2.wsd.wednet.edu

Heritage University
GEAR UP
Ray Navarro, Director
(509) 865-8500
Navarro_r@heritage.edu

Central Washington University GEAR UP
Beverly Vifian, Director
(509) 963-1253
vifianb@cwu.edu

Renton GEAR UP
Barbara Fujita
Program Manager
(425) 204-2880
bfujita@renton.wednet.edu

Lower Yakima Valley GEAR UP
Loueta Johnson, Director
(509) 574-6810
johnsonl@u.washington.edu

Washington State University GEAR UP
Genoveva Morales Ledesma
Director
(509) 372-7278
gmorales@tricity.wsu.edu

Pierce College GEAR UP
Connie Brown, Director
(253) 537-0211 ext 4438
cbrown@pierce.ctc.edu

The Evergreen State College
GEAR UP Project
Dr. Kathe Taylor, Director
(360) 867-5136
kathet@evergreen.edu

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GEAR UP
Higher Education Coordinating Board
917 Lakeridge Way S.W.
PO Box 43430
Olympia, WA 98504-3430

